

TTISNEWS Newsletter

The Thorney Island Society

Friends of St.James's Park and The Green Park

Promoting interest and high standards in planning, design and the environment



Celebrating the Diamond Jubilee in St. James's Park



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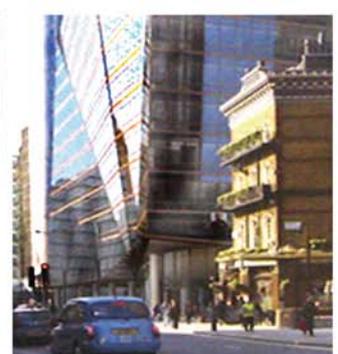
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web site : www.thethorneyislandsociety.org.uk

The Thorney Island Society

Friends of St.James's Park and The Green Park

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TTIS news : The Thorney Island Society Newsletter

Welcome to the new format of the newsletter. Economy and costs are a driver of communication at times and so the 'A5' version is such as to make the most out of the second class postage. We hope that you like it. We welcome your comments and contributions, and assistance in its future productions.

A design point of view

The Thorney Island Society being at the heart of Westminster has a key role to play. It enjoys a special relationship since through our Founders and Chairman June Stubbs, it came into being opposing the Council's proposals under Shirley Porter, to replace the oldest public library in London by a Land Securities office scheme. Today, the Council administration is different, yet the ability to achieve its own objectives has not changed. The high standards and quality of development that produced Belgravia and 'Cubit town' came about in part because of land ownership and opportunity. So it ought to be in today's development of the prime location at the heart of Westminster; Land Securities being the majority land owner.

The original plan for Victoria Street proposed in the days of the LCC, was imaginative, avoiding a tight canyon effect of parallel buildings, all built to the edge of the property boundary. Unfortunately the stretch between Parliament Square and Artillery Mansions became the sterile environment that it is, a canyon, concentrating exhaust fumes. The current proposals of the remainder of Victoria Street is to be the same, but with bigger buildings. Gone is an understanding of holistic urban design, that made the remaining part of Victoria Street the best urban environment for pedestrians in London.

It therefore behoves individuals and local societies to be ever watchful and questioning of the decisions of those in administration. It is correctly said that details determine the quality of a design. This is true for large projects and of the small. Often the small do not receive the attention they should perhaps because it is thought they will not be noticed; but they are registered in the subconscious. Consider Barclays on Artillery row. The listed building's facade has been carefully refurbished. There is a series of shop fronts carefully set into the building. The Facias are set within the facade - but not in the case of Barclays. Here it has been applied to the front, is crudely designed and with external lighting. We are advised that it was granted planning consent: and this is in a Conservation Area ! The urban environment has been marred carelessly

Editorial

Alien Visual invasion

The skyline of Westminster Village and beyond is changing. No longer is it that of the familiar buildings of red brick with stone dressings, or the cornices of stucco terraces, or the relatively modest offices. The vista down Marsham Street is now terminated by the still growing tower in Vauxhall. The top of this tower is ubiquitous, and where once there would only be sky, suddenly it 'pops up'. This is, we gather only the beginning of the invasion, as Wandsworth Council has given approval for two towers of 58 and 43 storeys at Nine Elms.

Battersea Power Station

According to the administrators handling the sale of the site, a consortium of two Malaysian firms has been selected as the preferred bidder to buy Battersea Power Station. An agreement has been reached that they will buy the listed building for approximately £400 million. The Chelsea football Club offer is therefore out of the running.

Under the plans the facade and chimneys would be preserved. The firm has committed to building a new underground station as part of the proposed Northern Line extension.

Planning 15.6.12

Importance of the Public Realm and it's perception

The changing character of Central Westminster and the Public Realm . What cost Civic Pride ? For many years the urban design was based on an original layout plan, providing variety and allowing interest as the spaces moved 'in and out' .The Albert Pub was a prominent object. Weather protection was incorporated in the architecture, making the upper part of Victoria Street the best in London : alas no longer .

Substantial changes are taking place in Westminster, and particularly along Victoria Street. The massive bulk of the replacement to Selborne House, is such that now the characterfull Albert Pub is overwhelmed.

Kingsgate House with its ground floor retail and Sansiburys is currently under demolition . The two replacement buildings are to be built to the 'back line of the pavement', leaving only the pavement between the shop fronts and the kerb edge. Lost is that margin which included flower boxes, seating and a degree of separation for the pedestrians from the kerb edge traffic. This was a unique urban design feature which raised the quality of Victoria Street for all, is sadly gone for ever. The planning authority could have maintained the citizens' environment. In the case of the Selborne House planning agreement, money which was to go towards environmental improvement of the site

was said could not be spent on the site, since it was completely built over.

These two planning decisions follow on from the much earlier one for Cardinal Place development. The only token gesture to the public realm was the space above the retail store; 'hidden' away at the back of the development. It adds little or nothing to the environment of the centre of Westminster.

The site on the corner of Victoria Street and Bresenden Place is to be a mixture of uses. This will include Westminster's Central Library. This might have been a building of quality instead of being accommodated over a supermarket. Is this good enough for the centre of Westminster, London's premier borough, so it is said ? Clearly our Masters have a lot to consider, but the quality of the built environment and its personality are weighed in the balances and found sadly wanting.



Kingsgate House now being demolished



Separation from traffic not replaced



Replacement for Kingsgate House taller, darker facade, increasing the canyon effect



Replacement of Selborne House, is massive with no relationship to other buildings

TTIS Feature : Visits to suit all tastes

The Society has over many years, through its voluntary organisers, been able to offer the membership a wide variety of visits. This year, Pippa Parsons has arranged a full and varied programme. The Summer issue of 'TTIS News' introduces a special 'Feature' focusing on a most exciting outing along the Regent's Canal - which should make us eager to sign up for another one or two!

See the next page for the programme.

The Thorney Island Society Bicentennial visit and inspection cruise to the Regent's Canal on Sunday 27th May 2012

Providing introduction and commentary along the route was Museum volunteer Lester Hillman. He shared four decades of professional expertise in planning, heritage and environmental work on the Regent's Canal and associated infrastructure including the Eurostar High Speed 1. In 2008 he was conferred a Visiting Professorship at the London Metropolitan Business School and he is Academic Adviser to the Islington Archaeology and History Society.

In glorious sunshine, at the one week countdown, the Society enjoyed something of a preview of London's Diamond Jubilee Water Pageant. Over refreshments at the London Canal Museum, tucked away behind King's Cross, about 20 members assembled for a pre-cruise briefing about the Museum, 'King's Cross', 'King's Place' 'Regent Quarter' and the area with its many royal associations. The Museum is celebrating its 20th year, opened by the Princess Royal 9th March 1992.

Westminster Transport Café

It was in a Westminster coffee shop just off Tottenham Court Road that the Canal's founders met 31st May 1811. The legislation for construction was laid before Parliament 7th May 1812. Despite the assassination of Spencer Perceval, Britain's Prime Minister, four days later, and five attempts to find a replacement administration, the Americans declaring war on Britain and Napoleon invading Russia, Parliament managed to deliver the Regent's Canal Act on 13th July 1812. Work began in the October but it took until 1st August 1820 for the construction to be completed. It was three times over budget with financial scandals, engineering challenges and even fights along the way.



Westminster Leads The Way

Two hundred years ago there were strict instructions that the Canal in today's Westminster be completed first and quickly. The Section from Little Venice through Regent's Park to Camden Town was ready for opening on the Prince Regent's birthday 12th August 1816.

That early construction phasing was echoed 150 years later in the opening up of the public towpath walk and amenities. The section in Westminster from Lisson Grove to the Zoo opened on 28th June 1968. The towpath eastwards followed in the early 1970s as the Central Electricity Generating Board 400kv cabling (today's National Grid) was installed alongside the canal.

Olympic Access

The Society visit was also timely in the context of London's 2012 Olympics which take place amongst a network of navigations at Stratford. Along the Regent's Canal in Westminster the Archery is at Lord's Cricket Ground.

The Museum is close to the spectacular new King's Cross Station concourse opened just a few weeks ago 19th March 2012. Next door at St Pancras International the Olympic Javelin trains will carry spectators to the Games, Stratford is just 7 minutes away. Eurostar celebrates five years of operations in the restored St Pancras and the Olympic torch should arrive on 26th July on the final leg of the journey to the Stadium.

Ice at 300 Centigrade

As London basked in 300 Centigrade weather, where better for the Society than to dive into London's Ice Museum where Norwegian ice was once stored and distributed. The Museum offers insights into the ice industry as well as a range of canal, boat and horse power exhibits. From the private terrace there are splendid views across the colourful boats in the hidden basin. There are buildings such as King's Place home since 2008 to the Guardian and Observer newspapers along with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, galleries, dining and conferencing facilities.

Walking on Water

The armada of vessels around London in readiness for the 1000 boat Thames Pageant 3rd June included 'President' a narrow boat alongside the Museum. This presented a slight challenge for the tunnel cruise boarding. However, with Angela leading the way the Society resolved embarkation magnificently and members clambered nimbly from vessel to vessel. Traversing and re-traversing the Islington tunnel, 960 yards long, the cruise vessel Tarporley passed under the busy Sunday morning Chapel Market and the New River (which despite its name is 400 years old next September). Deftly turning at the City Road Basin, once London's inland port, members found themselves almost on the doorstep of Mayor of London Boris Johnson's Islington home. At temporary moorings below Thornhill Bridge Thorney Islanders jumped ashore, and final disembarkation was achieved regally amongst the sculptures at King's Place.

Report by Lester Hillman

Localism - an on going process

There is much discussion as to how the Localism Act 2011 might affect planning and its performance. Westminster Council has approved Queen's Park as a 'community council' - the first in the Borough. Other groups of people are considering the options on the understanding that it can offer the possibility of taking on the decision process for what happens 'locally'. This would have to receive approval from the Council through a focused discussion.

There are costs involved for the setting up, obtaining the approval of the Council, and for running the 'group' for the first period which is five years. After that it would have to be renegotiated. Some have suggested that a local Amenity Society might wish to go through the process, while the key question is 'why'? The Planning Authority remains the ultimate determining power. Most societies are registered charities with a fee paying membership. They could not simply switch to becoming one of the new set-ups, which has different terms of reference, and is based on a rigid geographical boundary.

There are a lot of unknowns in this while the finer points are still being developed by the Government. Further opinions and information may be found on the London Forum and Amenity and Civic Societies web site. TTIS were founder members of the London Forum, which holds occasional meetings of 'mutual' planning interest.

<http://www.londonforum.org.uk/>

Future Visits Programme

July 2012 to September 2012

Details will be found on our web site, and are usually posted or e-mailed as you wish. The bookings are on a 'first come first lucky' basis .

Enquiries can be made preferably by Email to pippa.parsons@yahoo.co.uk, or 020 7222 2795 or by text on the day 07791 413 453. web site www.thethorneyislandsociety.org.uk

12th July, ARBORICULTURE AMBLE

@ 6 pm with PAUL AVERS £6 donation : wine will be provided

14th August, BUCKINGHAM PALACE and DIAMONDS ' A JUBILEE CELEBRATION'

@ 11 am £18 donation

7th September, The DE MOORAGE CENTRE

@ 10.30am £10 donation.

coffee & biscuits will be provided

11th September KEATSHOUSE

@ 10.30am £7 donation

Royal Parks : Past, Present and Future

The whole management structure of the seven Royal Parks has changed, as the Government has handed it over to the 'The Mayor of London'. A newly constituted 12 person Board with much greater political

With the Society's role as 'Friends of The Green Park and St James's Park', June Stubbs and Tom Ball attended a meeting of the Royal Parks Friends Forum. This was to meet the newly appointed Royal Parks Chief Executive Linda Lennon. She considered 'the Friends of the Royal Parks', one of its biggest assets, for their contribution to the overall well being of the Parks.

These are affected by financially difficult times as the Government's support has continued to be reduced. All are very concerned that in this light there is ever increasing pressure for the Parks to raise money through commercial activities and events. There is increasing conflict between this and the natural 'reservoir' of the Parks. Pressure is for huge concerts with loud amplification, disturbing surrounding habitat and residents may be as much as a mile away; to temporary exhibitions and trade fairs. There is also the greater presence of cyclists and their high speed 'go anywhere' behavior; in conflict with walkers.

All Parks are suffering from the impact on the biodiversity and the wear and tear of the grass, natural habitat, planting and wild life. This year is particularly stressful due to the Diamond Jubilee and the Olympic's activities. The conditions affecting our own two Parks apart

form anything else, will take a very long time to physically recover, while the biodiversity will take longer.

The Friends are in part the conscience which reminds us that the heritage green lungs are for all and need our concern and protection, as the inheritance from the past and for the future. That is one reason why the Society has been so very concerned by the Memorial to the dead of Bomber Command. It is not as some have cynically argued against us, that we had no concern nor recognition of the role of Bomber Command during World War Two. Apart from anything else, many members are of an age to recall the actuality of those days. No, it is the huge impact, the physical consequences, and the collateral damage to biodiversity. It is the impact on centuries old inheritance which was to maintain a parkland untrammelled by structures, for those who were not able to enjoy or experience the natural countryside. That has now been lost for all times when it need not have been, as the memorial could have been located elsewhere in central London and which as Friends of the Royal Parks, we had hoped to achieve through a sense of caring.

Tom Ball



The impact of the Memorial to Bomber Command on The Green Park environment : before and now

The Archive

The Society's Archive, at 10 Old Pye Street includes a fascinating collection of books, postcards, prints, maps, photographs and more and has recently undergone re-cataloguing and a grand tidy up. This is the second year we have opened our doors to the public as part of the South West Fest (7th July 2012). Members are always welcome to visit by appointment and should contact Juliet Lyle on 07939 072534 or via the website. Margaret Woodall brings a wonderful insight to her work.

Travels and Travails of an Archivist

As an archivist I have worked in modern offices, historic buildings, and country houses, usually in basements, but, once, in an attic with views over parkland with house-martins flying past the windows. The work is dusty and dirty, often heavy - some 19th century volumes require two people to lift them. I have carried documents across a roof at Norwich Cathedral, donned a "hard-hat" and safety jacket to reach an office at The Royal Institution, and driven through a blizzard to retrieve documents from a County Hall in Michigan, but usually I am to be found at a desk, surrounded by piles of paper.

The greatest challenge is to create some order in a muddle of papers, arranging and listing them so that information becomes accessible. There are always gaps and it is a thrill when a "missing link" is discovered.

I have listed and catalogued estate documents, administrative records, scientific collections, photographs, and family papers. Some archives, like that of The Thorney Island Society, contain a mixture of material - administrative, photographic, and personal, letters, minutes, plans, scrapbooks, and postcards. Some collections consist only of correspondence or iconographic material.

The handwriting can be difficult - sometimes impossible - to read, and signatures indecipherable. Photographs of unidentified people abound, and I thank those with the foresight to caption the images. Often, the document is fragile, damaged by water or wildlife, with missing sections and disordered pages.

However, when the papers have been ordered and studied, people come to life. Humphry Davy discusses poetry and chemistry with Coleridge, and "doodles" in the margins of his notebooks; Victorian gentlemen at The Royal Institution complain of the excessive space taken up by the ladies' crinolines; James Dewar, in traditional professorial style, writes, illegibly, on the back of envelopes. Howard Florey and his Oxford

team record the vital experiments, which bring penicillin into clinical use. At Belmont, Kent, the 1st Lord Harris (1746-1829) argues with the East India Company and worries about his children's inheritance; his daughter-in-law, Eliza, visits the Low Countries in 1814 and dismisses Ostend as "not famous for any thing in particular"; and the 3rd Lord Harris, when Governor of Trinidad, has plants sent from England for the Botanic Gardens in Port of Spain, and turnip seeds sent for planting at Government House.

The satisfaction of my job is to produce some degree of order from chaos, the excitement is that I never know what I will find. One day, at Belmont, a cardboard shoe-box appeared on the desk: it contained some undistinguished Christmas cards, but underneath - a letter from the Duke of Wellington and one from Beau Brummel. I do not yet know what treasures The Thorney Island Society archive will yield, but at the very least, it will provide an unique collection of information about the people, architecture and history of the area.
Margaret Woodall

Pens are for sheep - not people

For many years a gradual increase of metal railings appeared along streets and around pedestrian crossings, and larger traffic islands. No matter how much inconvenience they caused to the public at large, they continued to be installed. Mysteriously and with little publicity if any, bit by bit they seemed to disappear in the middle of the night.

What joy to be free of so much pointless visual clutter, and giving back a sense of equal personal responsibility when on the highway. I wonder who benefited from the resale value? But 'hoorah'

The Onlooker

Planning

The Society is advised of the applications which are in our area by Westminster Planning. The intention is that we should comment as appropriate. Where a written response is made, these are also on our website under 'Planning'.

Recent Planning Applications

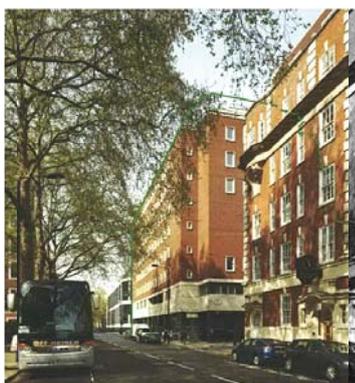
The site whose future has been a long time coming up, is that for the replacement of the Magistrates Court, on Horseferry Road. The final application which has been granted planning consent, is for residential development. The site is important to TTIS given its historical neighbours - particularly the listed formerly 'Fegan House'. This robust Edwardian building of brick with stone dressings expresses so much of the indigenous character of our area.

It is extremely disappointing that the planning authority has approved a building which looks like an alien office, and has no empathy with its context. An earlier proposal, put forward a much more sympathetic elevation, including brick.

While the proposals for the new elevations for No. 1 Page Street now in progress include brick at the request of the client so we understand. The proposals for the large redevelopment of the Abell and Cleland site, neither include any brick, nor brick colour. The appearance presents another alien to the environment as office looking blocks of flats.

Who one wonders takes notice of local community wishes, after being asked and spending serious time assessing the applications ? Where is that sensitivity in the planning review and committee that recognises an holistic context, the local environment such as typified by the Westminster Village ?

TTIS Planning Committee



Proposals for the Magistrates' Court now in progress

THE THORNEY ISLAND SOCIETY

Registered Charity No 1000751

The Society is a voluntary amenity and civic Society which came into being in 1985. It is concerned with the welfare of the physical environment of a widening area, sometimes referred to as the 'Westminster Village'. It organises visits and occasional dinners, reviews planning applications, and maintains a local archive. There are 380 Members. We welcome support and help on the different aspects of the Society

TTIS web site

www.thethorneyislandsociety.org.uk

Become a Member

New members are most welcome. As a local Amenity Society our interests are in appreciating and conserving the good things of the area. and encouraging better. The help and support from many of our members is appreciated. Join by finding the application form on the web site

For your diary

- Visits** see web site for details
- 12th July **ARBORICULTURE AMBLE**
- 14th August **BUCKINGHAM PALACE and DIAMONDS ' A JUBILEE CELEBRATION'**
- 7th Sept **The DE MOORAGE CENTRE**
- 11th Sept **KEATS HOUSE**

South Area Forum

15th October - venue to be arranged

Transport and Olympics

To help you plan around travel hotspots in London during the Olympic and Paralympic Games

Visit

www.GetAheadoftheGames.com

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